

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 13, wherein:

said process gas mixture further comprising a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas.

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said process gas mixture further comprising a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas.

Claim 18 (Original): A method according to claim 15 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O₂, and N₂ where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claim 19 (Cancelled)

13. Claim 20 (Withdrawn) A magnetic recording medium produced by the method of claim